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UNIVERSITY AS THE SPACE OF CLASHING DISCOURSES. STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR SURVIVAL IN THE ERA OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Uniwersytet jako przestrzeń ścierających się dyskursów.
Strategie i taktyki przetrwania w dobie pandemii COVID-19**

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Abstract

Strategies and tactics are the key categories in Michel de Certeau's (1988) concept of quotidian practices, which analysed and interpreted actions undertaken at higher education institutions faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. Following de Certeau, it is presumed that strategies denote actions taken by entities which exercise power over a space or domain, and are able to regulate relations with the outside, e.g. through the introduction and enforcement of laws, while tactics are employed by those who, navigating a territory which is not their own, have to submit to authority and law, but do so in their own way in that they negotiate and interpret rules in a more or less active and creative fashion, taking "shortcuts" and circumventing the law, conceiving ad hoc solutions, selectively choosing and bending norms, etc.

This conceptualization enabled us to examine research problems relating to the "top-down" and "bottom-up" actions taken at a university in response to the pandemic; the clashing discourses and everyday practices of negotiating meanings, threats and solutions; the establishment of superiority-subordination relations and seeking ways to forge subjectivity and agency in a situation of protracted pandemic crisis. This paper relies on secondary data analysis, analysis of official documents and available reports concerned with the functioning of universities during the pandemic, including an analysis of the strategies adopted at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (UWM) with respect to pandemic threats, specifically targeting the ordinances and decisions of the university authorities. In order to identify and explore the tactics, this study takes advantage of the results of an online survey from the turn of 2022

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involving a sample of 172 persons employed at the UWM. Importantly, the survey featured open and semi-open questions, which went beyond ready-made response patterns. As a result of the analyses, two paradigms were identified, i.e. institutional and staff discourses, within which the UWM's strategy of colour and the staff tactics of continuation, accommodation, embracing and resistance were identified.

Keywords: higher education, strategies, tactics, COVID-19 pandemic, remote education.

Streszczenie

Strategie i taktyki to kluczowe kategorie koncepcji praktyk codzienności Michela de Certeau (1988), które stały się podstawą analizy i interpretacji działań podejmowanych w szkołach wyższych w obliczu pandemii COVID-19. Za de Certeau przyjmujemy, że strategie to działania podejmowane przez podmioty mające władzę nad miejscem i będące w stanie regulować stosunki z zewnętrżnością, np. poprzez wprowadzanie i egzekwowanie prawa, zaś taktyki przynależą tym, którzy poruszając się po nieswoim terytorium muszą podporządkowywać się władzy i prawu, ale robią to na swój sposób, dokonując mniej lub bardziej aktywnych i twórczych negocjacji i interpretacji zasad, chodząc „na skróty” i obchodząc prawo, tworząc doraźne rozwiązania, selektywnie dobierając i naginając normy etc.

Koncepcja ta pozwoliła nam przyjrzeć się problemom badawczym związanym: z „odgórnymi” i „odolnymi” działaniami podejmowanymi w szkole wyższej wymuszonymi pandemią; ze ścieraniem się dyskursów i codziennych praktyk polegających na negocjowaniu znaczeń, zagrożeń i rozwiązań; z ustalaniem relacji nadrzędności-podporządkowania i poszukiwaniem sposobów budowania podmiotowości i sprawczości w sytuacji przedłużającego się pandemicznego kryzysu. W artykule wykorzystaliśmy wtórną analizę danych, analizę dokumentów urzędowych i zastanych raportów dotyczących funkcjonowania uczelni wyższych w czasie pandemii, wpisując w to analizę strategii Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie (UWM) wobec zagrożeń związanych z pandemią, odnoszącą się przede wszystkim do analizy zarządzeń i decyzji władz uniwersyteckich. Do rozpoznania taktyk wykorzystaliśmy część wyników badań ankietowych, zrealizowanych w formule online na przełomie 2021/2022 roku na próbie 172 osób – pracowników UWM, pochodzących z odpowiedzi na otwarte i półotwarte pytania, a więc wykraczające poza gotowe schematy odpowiedzi. Dzięki przeprowadzonym analizom udało się nam wyodrębnić dwa dyskursy: instytucjonalny oraz pracowniczy, w obrębie których zidentyfikowaliśmy strategię kolorów zastosowaną przez UWM oraz pracownicze taktyki kontynuacji, dostosowania się, uwzględniania oraz oporu.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja wyższa, strategie, taktyki, pandemia COVID-19, edukacja zdalna.

Introduction

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government first decided to suspend teaching at higher education institutions, only to relaunch it two weeks later; however, it would be carried out in a remote mode on an unprecedented, massive scale. The decision-makers, the universities and their staff – the administration and the teachers – as well as the students, would have to function in new circumstances.

Shortly after the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic, a French historian, philosopher and sociologist Marcel Gauchet (2020) gave an interview to the magazine *Le Figaro* in which he described the coronavirus as a “defect tiger”. In the conversation, he claimed that the current crisis acts as a magnifying glass, highlighting all the weaknesses of state systems. M. Gauchet’s diagnosis also seems to give a good name to the initial problems of the Polish education system, including higher education, which had to face unprecedented challenges.

Higher education institutions have faced changes whose causes were far from them. Academic teachers, as if in an emergency mode, were obliged to conduct remote classes. This peculiar period of online education has become known in the scientific literature as “crisis education” or “forced online education” (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, pp. i–vi). To a degree, such terms reflect the initial unpreparedness of educational systems, both in Poland and internationally, for systemic implementation of educational solutions in the new realities (The United Nations, 2020).

Higher education institutions became a kind of social laboratory focusing, as in a lens, on the perspectives of the various actors involved in academic education, creating a space where distinct legal, institutional, group and individual discourses contended; a domain where different strategies and tactics were devised to tackle an unknown reality.

Strategies and tactics as conceptualized by Michel de Certeau

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (orig. *L'invention du quotidien*), M. de Certeau describes the actions (sets of activities) of groups and categories in a position of subordination, inferiority or – as he writes – characterized by “dominated status”, thanks to which these groups can actively respond to their situation and, by conforming to the rules imposed top-down, process and adapt them to their own conditions, doing so at their own discretion and ingenuity. According to de Certeau, being dominated does not mean being passive and docile (1988, pp. XI, XIII). In this approach, relations of superiority-subordination involve both relations related to power and legislation as well as production and consumption. The superior side produces objects, content, and rules which should be received, assimilated or consumed by the dominated (subordinated) side but which are actually “used”. The eponymous “invention of the quotidian” consists of variable uses of the products (content) imposed by the dominant orders (Pancewicz-Puchalska, 2016, p. 113).

Thus, the individual in contemporary society is not a passive consumer, as they create new spaces of freedom through the tactics they develop. Thus, de Certeau argues against the notion that modernity is produced by passive subjects, propounding the concept of active individuals who transform their everyday lives in creative ways (Demirpolat, 2021, pp. 350–362). Television production may be a case in point: its viewer is never a passive consumer, as consumption involves “other”, secondary production in which the (dominated) viewers exploit the products they are supplied and, to some extent, imposed upon in an individualized and unique fashion. Television can be watched in dozens of ways: it may be treated as a home cinema, but it may equally well be playing in the background to accompany daily activities; the viewer can be only partially or fully engaged, and the broadcast content can be commented on with other members of the household or the sound can be turned off (cf. Morley, 1986).

In order to understand the relationship between producers and consumers or legislators and citizens, de Certeau introduces the categories of “strategy” and “tactics”. A strategy presupposes the existence of a subject of will (power) in a specific environment and requires a space that can be recognized by this subject as their own, i.e. subject to their will and authority. The space is essential to establishing relationships with a different externality. Strategies are used by those who formulate laws or rules applied in a specific space or place and by producers whose goods and services are purchased for specific needs. Tactics, on the other hand, are used by those who do not possess a space of their own and surrender to top-down rules, navigating the space belonging to “another”. They cannot take complete possession and control of that space, but neither can they fully distance themselves from it (Certeau, 1988, p. XIX).¹ Strategy is based on the assumption of existing power, and tactics are informed by the absence of power (p. 38). Tactics do not have their bases in which to accumulate power and remain independent of the circumstances (p. XIX). De Certeau speaks in this context of “poaching” or “making do”, as well as playing out events so as to turn them into opportunities. Actions of this kind are performed daily in such seemingly banal practices as speaking, reading, driving, shopping or cooking (p. XIX).

Having power and space at their disposal, strategies elaborate systems and discourses which arise due to the fact that products and rules are interconnected and – more or less – combined, integrated objects, while dispersed and diverse tactical actions do not develop into a discourse, but assume the form of numerous decisions to take advantage of the opportunities, doing things “one’s own way”, exploiting time and circumstances, coping or “making do” (p. XIX); it is a modality of practices through which consumers and citizens reclaim space and consequently act “in their own way” (p. XIX), turning the domination of the power-holders to their advantage. While there may be thousands of such practices, they are likely to have an internal logic, according to the author (p. XIV). Unlike Foucault, de Certeau believes that actors who are considered passive transform products and the reality they are imposed upon by how they use them and how they function within that reality, precisely by means of the tactics they conceive and implement. Thus, tactics may sometimes be said to take the upper hand over strategies, which consist of much greater mobility (Demirpolat, 2021). Foucault (1995) analyses the technology of power dispersed in the practices of the system of bureaucracy

¹ Here, we may draw on an example of urban planning: the city authorities, who have space at their disposal, strategically designate street networks, give them names, define the rules of traffic, provide the inhabitants with instructions – maps and signage of all types – instructing them how to move around the city. Residents navigate a space which is “public”, and thus not entirely their own, but not entirely alien either, through tactical negotiation with the discourse of power which amounts to dispersed uses: they take shortcuts, trample their own paths, give places their own names and monikers, make innovative use of urban infrastructure (Cf. Whyte, 1980. See also Andres et al., 2020).

and administration. The goal of power is the production of self-controlled and self-policing subjects that internalize norms and values introduced top-down. Micro-techniques creating “disciplinary society” are embedded in modern institutions (education, medicine, industrial production). Michael Gardiner writes that while Foucault describes practices of power as ubiquitous and encoded in an everyday life discipline (de Certeau sees them as “strategies”), he ignores the activities of those, who should be “docile bodies” but who resist in many ways the power. Contrary to Foucault who studies the genealogy of discipline – as Gardiner (2020, p. 168), points out – de Certeau “wants to understand ‘anti-disciplines’, the silent and unacknowledged forms of resistance”, that – we should add – not necessarily lead to rebellions, uprisings, revolts but, as much as the techniques of power, keep the social system functioning.

Michel de Certeau’s concept in research on (higher) education

Reconstructing teaching practice as outlined by de Certeau (2010, pp. 55–56), it may be argued that the author approaches it as a strategy; it appears as

the activity of adapting the existing knowledge – received from the past – to the necessities and questions of the present generation, who alters and transforms it. This act includes the contradictory poles of preservation and alteration in an undecidable relationship: passing the tradition and, at the same time, passing it in a way that leaves enough space for the students to ‘capture the speech’ into it. (Rovea, 2022, p. 66)

The teacher, therefore, has specific knowledge and uses strategies to communicate (teach) it; they perform the appropriate activities to prepare for teaching, choosing pertinent modalities of instruction. Thus, he or she determines the space in which others navigate. The learners, on the other hand, taking advantage of the opportunity of the space, transform the knowledge to make it more easily absorbed, using their own tactics. De Certeau’s concepts are also applied in analyses of educational policies or daily practices in higher education. In fact, several research projects on higher education in recent years have drawn on the concept of strategies and tactics. For instance, S. Saltmarsh (2015, pp. 38–54) analysed educational policy in terms of parental involvement and concluded that the practices of everyday life are determined not only by the strategies employed by the dominant educational system or its structure but also by the parallel or collaborative tactics. M. J. Curry and T. M. Lillis (2016, pp. 1–28) arrived at similar conclusions, stating that a critical approach to education policy should take into account not only the system itself but also the teachers, students and their families as active practitioners rather than passive consumers. Using de Certeau’s concept of strategies and tactics, the researchers explored the key solutions to which academics resort when preparing papers for publication to meet the demands of the competitive environment of reputable journals. Their research confirmed that academics use both the strategies dictated by the official policies of publishers and make use of their own tactics to tackle and manage the rules deriving from such policies. Depending on the situation, authors

have used tactics of embracing, accommodating or resisting the dominance of the English-speaking regime in the systems of producing and disseminating knowledge as well as in evaluation systems.

A number of French theorists have also studied de Certeau's analyses of education. J. Y. Séradin (2017, pp. 1–15) highlights the link between the former's conceptions concerning education systems and the Jesuit tradition; B. Jacomino (2016, pp. 105–119) reflects on the centrality of death at school, surmising, among other things, that to educate is to die. With the tools sourced from the tradition conveyed by the master (teacher), the student may do something new. They then corroborate the otherness which the master allows but which they cannot predict. This inventive capacity eludes them and confronts them with the limitations of the tradition as well as their own finitude. The pupil's invention condemns the master to oblivion, although the master owes his/her existence to the pupils.

With respect to Polish contributions, A. Zwolińska (2021, pp. 16–24) studied stimulating active tactics among students and graduates entering the labour market in relation to the strategies adopted by two universities: the Warsaw School of Economics and the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw. The author characterized four areas of strategy that influenced the tactics of students seeking employment: the structure of the university and the modality of teaching, cooperation with employers, the physical and virtual space of the university, the ongoing narrative concerning the labour market, and the tactics that the students adopted in the circumstances.

The concept of strategies and tactics does not constitute a unified theory with elaborated theorems, laws, models and systems of notions that enable analytical categories to be unequivocally operationalized. Instead, in the research discussed in this paper, it is treated as an inspiring perspective which facilitates analysing and interpreting specific phenomena, processes and activities of which everyday life is constructed. Using the notions of "strategies" and "tactics" as conceived by de Certeau, we look at the daily life of a university whose stable routine was undermined and disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategies and tactics alike were used to rebuild this stability, restore a sense of security, and mask the prostheticity and provisionality of solutions.

Methodological foundations of our research

This paper exploits the ambiguity of the concepts and notions advanced by M. de Certeau (1988). The current analysis, aimed at interpreting the actions undertaken by both the authorities and staff at the UWM to enable its operation in the prolonged COVID-19 emergency, draws on the interpretive filter of that concept, presuming that actors with power over a place develop specific strategies, e.g. by introducing and enforcing laws (the Rector), whereas those who navigate a territory which is not their own must submit

to authority and law (staff) and, while doing so, construct specific tactics for negotiating and interpreting rules, taking “shortcuts” and circumventing the law, devising interim solutions, selectively choosing and bending applicable norms. Relying on de Certeau’s conception, we were able to examine targeted issues in the “top-down” and “bottom-up” actions undertaken in higher education; assess the clash of discourses and everyday practices involving the negotiation of meanings, threats and solutions; identify how superiority-subordination relations are established and how one seeks to build subjectivity and agency in a situation of protracted emergency.

To accomplish the objectives of this research, an analysis of secondary data and official documents and reports on the functioning of universities during the pandemic was conducted. This included an analysis of the strategies adopted by the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn to mitigate the risks of the pandemic, looking at the ordinances and decisions of the university authorities in the first place. The tactics, on the other hand, were studied primarily by trying to identify traces of scattered actions, which need not have been deliberate, thought-over or organized. In this respect, the study relied on the responses of UWM staff to questions in a survey developed for the research headed by the Police Academy in Szczytno as part of *Education of the uniformed services (and beyond) in the age of the Sars-Cov-2 coronavirus pandemic causing Covid-19 disease. Studies on ensuring continued education and safety to subjects in the university or school environment. Forms and types of re(construction) of the learning environment following the pandemic situation*, a large-scale project which was completed in 2022. The project involved both Polish and foreign universities which provide education to the uniformed services, such as the project leader, or the Polish Naval Academy in Gdynia, as well as public higher education institutions, e.g. the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The research team was responsible for the online survey among the UWM staff: the research faculty and the teachers, as well as management and administration. A total of 172 persons completed the survey questionnaire.

When analysing the results for the purposes of this paper, it was decided not to include quantitative data. Given the objective of the analyses presented here, the focus was on what went beyond ready-made, imposed response patterns in the questionnaire, i.e. the answers to open questions, or rather open and semi-open questions as an addition to the finite set of cafeteria questions. In this type of research, such questions often offer scope for supplementary information, giving respondents an opportunity to express themselves if they feel that the conceptual categories imposed by the survey design are not sufficient or adequate. Therefore, attention was paid to what the respondents had to say when answering open-ended questions or questions such as “other, which?”.

Using the terminology of the author of *The Practices of Everyday Life*, and thus engaging in “making do” or “poaching”, two discourses were distinguished at the university: the institutional and the staff discourse², which were revealed by looking first at the strategies – or the single strategy of the University authorities – and subsequently at the staff tactics, or rather the traces they left behind.

Institutional discourse: The strategy of colours

The law which governs universities in Poland is the Act of 20 July 2018 – the Law on Higher Education and Science (Act, 2018). Given the organization of the teaching process, the act delegates a number of crucial powers and tasks to particular bodies within higher education institutions in Poland. According to the provisions of the Act, the essential bodies of public higher education institutions include the University Council, the Rector and the Senate. Particular attention is paid to the powers of the Rector with respect to day-to-day management of the university, including the teaching process, as prompt responses and introduction of strategies which ensured the safety of the staff and the students were vital during the pandemic. The Rector of the UWM – having the power and the space – implemented an integrated work system and the UWM, which was contingent on the degree of epidemic risk. It was decided to refer to that system as the strategy of colours. Here, a single strategy was delineated spanning various areas of the university's operation (education, organization of work, etc.), although the team was aware that one could, following A. Zwolińska (2021), distinguish separate strategies applicable to specific areas.

In Order No. 93 of 30 October 2020, the Rector of UWM instituted a range of work systems in force at the university during a state of epidemic or epidemic emergency (Order No. 93, 2020). With a view to minimizing the risk to the staff, doctoral students and students in a state of epidemic and to ensure the continuity of the university's operation, four work systems were introduced:

1. the ordinary system, designated as the green system;
2. a system in a state of moderate emergency, designated the yellow system;
3. a system in a state of high emergency, designated the orange system
4. a system in a critical state, designated the red system.

That strategy of colours dictates how work is to be performed across the organizational units at the UWM depending on the level of the epidemic threat, and specifies the particulars of the teaching process:

1. in the green system, classes are held at the university premises and facilities in the form provided for in the curriculum,

² Though undoubtedly worth reconstructing, the student discourse was beyond the scope of the adopted research concept, and therefore it was not targeted in the analyses.

2. in the yellow system, a proportion of the classes may be conducted remotely, while the rest may be conducted as in the green system; decisions in this respect are made by the respective deans in consultation with the vice-rector for education,

3. in the orange system, only practical classes that cannot be conducted remotely are taking place on-site; the remainder are conducted remotely,

4. in the red system, all classes are conducted remotely; the manner and scheduling of classes that cannot be conducted remotely are determined by the respective deans in consultation with the vice-rector for education.

It should be noted that the earliest regulations pertaining to education were introduced even before the Rector's Order No. 93 of 30 October 2020 on the work systems. Classes were suspended took under the Rector's Order No. 32 of 11 March 2020 (Order No. 32, 2020). The instrument affirmed the suspension of all teaching activities at the university, as well as the closure of the university library with regard to the use of its resources. Based on the order, previously scheduled academic, sporting and artistic events, as well as staff trips to regulate teaching and the arrival of external guests (researchers and students), were also cancelled.

Another document regulating teaching issues at the university was the Rector's Order No. 37 of 26 March 2020 (Order No. 37, 2020). The document recommended the resumption of teaching using distance learning tools: Microsoft Teams software, Moodle e-learning platform and the LMS ILJAS educational platform. At the same time, the instructors were obligated to inform the students immediately about the forms of remote teaching through electronic correspondence and information posted on the websites of respective departments. From 30 March 2020 onwards, classes were held as previously scheduled. Teachers were permitted to adapt the modes of verifying whether learning outcomes were accomplished in line with the nature of their classes. In addition, the existing restrictions on the departures and arrivals of academics and the limitations concerning scientific, sporting and artistic events were upheld. Provisions on detailed examination procedures and work placements were introduced in the Rector's Order No. 44 of 6 May 2020 (Order No. 44, 2020). The above ordinances adhere to the red system of work.

Importantly, the characteristics of the UWM, such as the highly diverse requirements of particular disciplines, preclude speaking of homogenous trends in transitioning to online learning. Certain decisions, e.g. concerning the recommended modes of learning, were made with reference to and at the level of individual organizational units. For example, at the Faculty of Medicine, only practical classes were conducted on-site since they could not be delivered remotely; the remaining classes were held remotely, as in the orange work system. Flexibility in this respect is understandable: solutions that work well when dozens of people attend a lecture may fail in small practice groups;

remote education methods adopted by a humanities faculty may be inadequate for medical majors.

The Rector's orders and decisions, especially those pertaining to specific problems involved in the teaching process and operations of the university administration, were supplemented by communications from the Rector and the Vice-Rectors. The communication of the Vice-Rector for Education and Students of 14 August 2020 (Vice-Rector's Communication, 2020) stated that distance learning be continued (where the teaching process did not require direct interaction between teachers and students) and that the university will rely on the mixed mode in the upcoming academic year 2020/2021. At the same time, the basic principles of the framework organization for the academic year and the need for a rotational teaching model were maintained.

Similar announcements were also issued before the commencement of the subsequent academic year. A communication from the Vice-Rector for Academic Policy and Research on 22 July 2021 (Vice-Rector's Communication, 2021) upheld the requirement to use face masks in all public buildings belonging to the university. A further communication from the Vice-Rector of 21 September 2021 (Communication from the Vice-Rector, 2021) concerned the organization of teaching in the academic year 2021/2022. According to the communication, beginning with the new academic year, all types of classes and seminars would be conducted on the university's premises in compliance with safety regulations. Likewise, all lectures delivered to no more than one group would be conducted on-site. At the same time, lectures intended for years comprising at least two groups were to be delivered remotely. This marked a significant change from the period March 2020 – June 2021, as in practice a significant proportion of lectures were resumed at the premises. The above regulations correspond to the yellow work system.

The characteristics of the work mode at individual departments under the ordinary system are specified in the UWM Work Regulations, i.e. exactly as in the green work system, which operates outside of an epidemic emergency. At the UWM, measures were also taken to tackle administrative, logistical and document circulation issues.

Depending on the system, administrative staff were able to undertake work on-site, in shifts or remotely. Heads of organizational units/persons in charge were required to draw up monthly work schedules for the departments they managed, taking into account the working hours of individual employees. Work schedules were to be drafted on a weekly basis in accordance with the principle of ensuring safe working conditions and rotation of staff between shifts.

It may be noted that the very first document concerning organizational issues, introduced even prior to Order No. 93/2020 on work systems, was Order No. 35/2020 (Order No. 35, 2020). Based on the regulation, administrative staff were able to start working remotely outside the university premises. The document stipulated the tech-

nical conditions for that working modality (including access to computers and the university's internal ICT systems), as well as defined the ways in which individual employees were to be assigned tasks and have their performance assessed. If remote working was not feasible, unit managers were obliged to organize rotational work. Initially, the duration of remote working was set until the end of March 2020. This was subsequently extended until further notice (Order No. 38, 2020).

Further measures were also adopted at the UWM to regulate logistical and document circulation issues. Under the orange and red system, documents at the University were conveyed through the Correspondence Distribution Room with limited direct contact between staff at various units. Where possible, contact was to be made by means of work e-mail service and by telephone (Order No. 93, 2020).

Staff discourse: Tactics

While strategies are relatively easy to “recount” since they may be conveyed in resolutions and orders, i.e. institutionalized regulations and knowledge, tactics are difficult to reduce to a series of recountable actions. From the standpoint of power, it is important that strategies are few, because multiplicity means inconsistency with the circumstances, incompleteness, alternativeness and ineffectiveness. Tactics, on the other hand, cannot be confined to several or more numerous forms of action; most likely, there were as many as there were employees. In the following paragraphs, however, they are put in order so that they can be recounted. The very act of grouping and naming them (creating typologies) is – as previously noted – a strategic device. Four groups of tactics emerge from the aforementioned survey.

Continuation: The “nothing new” tactics

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a new educational reality. Academic teachers were obliged to deliver digitally mediated education. For many, that new situation may have been a barrier and compelled self-education in that area (Winiarczyk & Warzocha, 2021, pp. 63–65). Consequently, training in the use of e-learning platforms and online applications became necessary. In their statements, some of the respondents indicated that the UWM had been preparing academic staff for the implementation of online learning for a long time, hence, for many academic teachers who received repeated training and used digital tools for remote education, e-learning was nothing new, albeit it did take place in a new, pandemic reality. Those lecturers who had no prior exposure to remote education tools were provided special training in the use of MS Teams applications.

UWM had already organized moodle platform training to slowly introduce e-learning as an alternative form of teaching.

(...) There were training sessions many years ago, repeated every year; whoever wanted would take advantage (not many people).

Some university teachers had previously used online platforms, but a training course in using MS Teams was nevertheless conducted for those who had not used this application (at the beginning of distance learning).

The training was conducted simultaneously as the online system was being implemented. At the same time, the comments and suggestions of the employees concerning the operation of the developing system were taken into account and put into practice.

In comparison, the results from a survey of lecturers at other universities, such as the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw, do not corroborate the “nothing new” tactic. Half of the respondents (50.8%) had had no experience with remote education before the pandemic. One in three respondents (35.4%) had participated in training or other distance activities, and one in seven (15.4%) had conducted training or other distance activities (Romaniuk & Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, 2020, p. 7). Thus, the experience of those who had been exposed to e-learning was not extensive. On the other hand, the results of a study by Centrum Cyfrowe indicate that 85% of teachers had no experience with remote education before the pandemic period (Buchner et al., 2020, p. 5).³ Similar results were obtained in a study conducted in July 2020 among 218 university teachers at the Pedagogical University of Krakow. Nearly 70% had not been previously involved in remote education, although more than half (52%) had taken advantage of training to improve their digital competence (Długosz & Foryś, 2020, pp. 33–34).

Accommodation: adaptation tactics (“I’ll do as required”)

In their statements, the respondents indicate that the UWM authorities reacted on an ongoing basis to the epidemic situation in the country, in the region and in the city, while at the same time adhering to the ministerial guidelines concerning the organization of the academic year, delivering education, personnel work trips, potential staff meetings and other meetings requiring direct interaction.

The Rector responds on an ongoing basis by issuing appropriate Orders taking into account the state of emergency in the province and the city.

The response to the development of the pandemic is quite rapid and follows the regulations at the national level. There are no major delays.

Many, but it is difficult for me to list them now. Certainly, the ban on work trips and receiving outside visitors (during the first period of the pandemic). Now trips and face-to-face meetings are to be heavily restricted. Meetings should only be held online.

Respondents emphasize that the university authorities, in response to the emergency, introduced an internal strategy of an integrated work system depending on the severity of the epidemic, which we have previously labelled as the colour strategy. They are also aware that it is necessary to comply with the applicable orders.

³ The research was conducted in 2020 with a nationwide representative sample of $N = 984$ persons.

Orders and communications from the Rector were issued accordingly as the threats changed. Colour zones (red, orange, yellow, green) were introduced to indicate the degree of virus risk. Each zone has specific restrictions that **must be strictly adhered** [emphasis added by authors] to while in force.

Rules have been introduced for the operation of the University in a state of epidemic emergency; a Team has been set up to prevent SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus infections as well as respond to emergencies caused by these infections; and the framework organization of the academic year has been changed.

At the same time, a number of respondents praised the rapid response of the university authorities and the substantive support received.

Guidelines on what our work should look like came very quickly, and we also received the necessary substantive support.

In order to contain SARS-CoV-2 cross-infections, classes were designed so that those involving small groups were held with the lecturer and the students on the premises, while those in large (combined) groups took place in the remote mode. At the same time, safety rules were introduced (DDM – distance, disinfection and masks) in conjunction with regular ventilation of the rooms where teaching took place. Academic staff were forced to adapt to the top-down restrictions.

In the hybrid system, classes are carried out depending on the volume of students in a year – the years with more than one dean group attending lectures online. The teaching staff then **adapt** [emphasis added by authors] to the arranged timetable, which translates into classes being conducted from home or from the university if there is a need to connect online at approximately the same time and then hold classes face-to-face.

In justified cases, and in the event of COVID-19 infections in a group, the dean's office would assign the group to distance learning.

In addition, instructors may apply for the remote mode of instruction in justified cases, and if there happens to be a student in the group who tests positive for Covid, the entire group switches to remote mode (all courses) for the period of isolation.

It should be added that these rules for organizing the teaching process during the COVID-19 pandemic did not differ from those in place at other universities across the country, of which our respondents are aware.

In terms of the pace of regulations and adaptation, the UWM does not differ from other universities; delays in changes are even advisable, as national regulations are often amended.

The capacity for applying particular ICTs and methods of distance learning was determined at the level of the organizational units of universities. This solution may be perceived to meet the expectations of a proportion of instructors. Considering focus group interviews conducted in June 2020 with academic teachers by M. Klimowicz, one may infer that the top-down guidelines concerning remote teaching tools enjoyed

greater approval among the teaching staff. Those teaching in units where a specific decision was taken at a high level declared that it made it easier for them to function in the new reality (Klimowicz, 2020, p. 14). Lecturers prefer clear-cut requirements for the virtual space in which online classes are to take place. Lucid communications about the preferred tools for remote education and user training are necessary actions for lecturers to “do things as required”.

Embracing: Active tactics (“I take matters into my own hands”)

Due to the forced first lockdown and the transition to remote education, lecturers had to master online learning platforms/apps quite quickly. This very often took the form of grassroots assistance from colleagues. People helped one another.

The training sessions were informal, having been initiated by staff with the above qualifications.

(...) the majority learned how to use TEAMS during the pandemic, **self-help flourished massively** [emphasis added by authors], and very good e-learning courses (to learn TEAMS and Moodle) were prepared at the university level.

It is worth noting that grassroots initiatives such as interdepartmental teams were also in evidence (e.g. the Teamsatorium at the Faculty of Social Sciences in cooperation with the Faculty of Biology and Biotechnology), in which academic teachers with experience in remote education organized training for staff willing to master MS Teams. The team later served as a platform for exchanging experiences, asking technical user questions and informing team members about relevant scientific events, meetings, training sessions or webinars.

At the Faculty of Social Sciences, a special team was set up for the academic staff, and a more experienced user of the Microsoft Teams application conducted training for the interested academic teachers.

In their statements, the respondents also emphasized that the introduction of the hybrid form of teaching enabled them to enjoy a certain freedom of decision concerning their classes, i.e. their form and mode, as well as how and when they were delivered. In the case of practical instruction or classes requiring direct interaction, they could be delivered as previously at the request of the academic teacher concerned. The teachers also used various methods to facilitate work and contact with colleagues and students, taking advantage of the capabilities of online platforms: they would upload or post ready-made presentations and original videos and conduct online classes in real-time, all with material supplied earlier by e-mail.

The academic teacher (course coordinator) was able to report those exercises which, in his/her opinion, could not be conducted remotely (e.g. classes in the field).

Sending class material to absentees, sharing most resources used by the instructor in a digital format.

For the sake of comparison, it may be worthwhile to review reports from national surveys, which reveal a range of active tactics used by the teaching staff. The academic teachers who participated, e.g. in a study at the Medical University of Warsaw, employed a variety of practices in remote education. Three-fourths of the respondents (74%) developed course content on an e-learning platform during remote learning, and two-thirds (60%) taught in real-time using tools and applications enabling online meetings. 42% of the respondents provided the materials, scripts and textbooks to students via email (Doroszewska et al., 2020, p. 25).⁴ Similar findings were arrived at in a study conducted at the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw. Predominantly, the academic teachers surveyed delivered instruction by means of virtual meetings with groups of students (90.8%). The teachers would provide links to important content (78.5%), share scans, photographs and presentations based on their own original (76.9%), provide instructions describing issues and tasks (76.9%), organize virtual one-to-one meetings (72.3%), communicate via chat (64.6%), and provide scans, photos and presentations of material from other authors (56.9%) (Romaniuk & Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, 2020, p. 10). On the other hand, remote education at the Pedagogical University of Krakow was most often conducted by making materials available in the form of presentations. Online classes taking place in real-time using platforms such as MS Teams were also widespread. Other common practices included consultations, sharing digital material, and sending textbook pages with which the students were to acquaint themselves. Video and audio recordings, which students could play back at any time, were provided by lecturers less frequently (Długosz & Foryś, 2020, p. 36).

Resistance: Passive tactics (“I don’t know”)

The following feedback was provided in the context of questions about general or internal regulations which were changed at the University as part of the response of the university authorities to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not all respondents were conversant with the legislation and admitted it openly. Certain respondents also professed ignorance regarding the prevention of undesirable consequences of isolation through internal cultural undertakings, animation, or involvement in sports or other activities at the university. Other respondents explicitly stated their disapproval of the proposed solutions and the situation in which they found themselves, contesting all decisions and evading implementation of distance education in every possible way or engaging in remote activities to the least possible extent (including, for example, refusing to turn on the camera or teaching using chat functionality exclusively). Such an approach may also be

⁴ These online surveys were conducted in June and July 2020 with a sample of 245 university teachers.

attributed to inferior specifications of the computer equipment required in remote education and hardware (such as cameras and microphones), insufficient user skill set on the part of academic teachers or lack of access to broadband internet.

The regulations have been changed, but I do not have detailed knowledge of this.

I do not have such information.

It is difficult for me to answer these questions.

I am not aware of such solutions.

I am not familiar with this issue.

I have no knowledge of the subject.

I do not know if such measures are taken at all.

I don't know the difference between internal and general regulations.

A diagnosis of remote education at Polish universities in its early phase was attempted by the Independent Students' Association. More than 3,400 students from 100 different universities in Poland took part in a diagnostic survey conducted in March/April 2020. Among the respondents, 53% stated that they had encountered a situation in which instructors did not conduct remote classes in any form. However, answering the question concerning how remote classes are carried out, 68% of the respondents stated "via email", 63% "platforms such as MS Teams, Skype, Discord", while 43% marked "virtual university system" (Białas et al., 2020, pp. 18–19). It may be noted that the research was conducted in the initial phase of the pandemic, but it still suggests a substantial use of passive tactics by the academic teachers at various higher education institutions in Poland.

Conclusions

Strategies and tactics are indicative of unequal, asymmetrical relations between the parties of interest. The entire system of relations which make up the everyday life of the university may be analysed from the standpoint of superiority and subordination, discourses of power and attempts to exploit the "logic" of the discourse for one's own benefit. The university authorities act discursively as they introduce new rules (local laws) for the period of emergency, issuing orders and decisions. For the rector, the university is an "own place" over which they exercise authority and where they dictate procedures and devices that serve to supervise, control and discipline staff and students. Consequently, they are also able to govern the relations with the environment and the circumstances which affect the operation of the institution. Employees are subject to orders and decisions, but they do so "in their own way": from thorough commitment and internalization of the rules to outright resistance. Most often, however, the approaches of the staff qualify between these extreme types.

Still, the positions which legitimize strategic and tactical action are relational: university authorities act strategically in “their own space” but may assume tactical positions with respect to external actions, e.g. the decisions of the minister, for whom that “own space” encompasses – to a greater or lesser extent – all schools and universities, or responding to the virus which, as an “extra-human actor”, redefines the circumstances in which the society operates (Afeltowicz & Wróblewski, 2021). The staff, on the other hand, are subordinated to strategic actions but may act strategically in relation to the students by treating the classes they teach as “their own spaces” in which they can lay down the rules and principles. This, however, could be the subject of a separate analysis.

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